regional level were organized on WTO matters in association with the apex Chambers of Commerce and Industry to build up a national consensus on our approach to the Third Ministerial Conference of the WTO.

The Indian delegation to WTO had included for the first time, representatives of the apex Industry associations and some Hon'ble Membes of Parliament, including those from Opposition Parties.

Pending Patent Cases

1124. SHRI PARMESHWAR KUMAR AGARWALLA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that several patenting cases are pending;

(b) if so, the number of cases pending during the last three years; and

(c) what steps are being taken to clear the pending cases in the Patent Offices expeditiously?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN): (a) Yes Sir.

(b) The number of cases pending are as below:

Year	Pending as at the end of March
1996-97	20619
1997-98	28027
1998-99	33276

(c) Government intends to prioritise the clearance of backlog of patent applications in a time bound manner.

Globalisation of Patent Offices

1125. SHRI PARMESHWAR KUMAR AGARWALLA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government propose to initiate globalisation of our patent offices keeping in view the changing scenario of patenting abroad; and

(b) if so, the steps being taken in this direction?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN): (a) and (b) Government has sanctioned a project for modernisation of the Patent Office at a cost of Rs. 75.59 crores. The major components of the project include setting up of a National Patent Office by upgrading the existing office in New Delhi, strengthening branch offices, providing trained and qualified personnel in the existing and emerging fields of technologies, computerisation and infrastructural support, financial and operational autonomy, creation of awareness by organising training programmes/ awareness seminars and clearance of backlog of unexamined patent applications.

However, a petition was filed in the Hon'ble High Court of Calcutta against setting up of National Patent Office. The Court has ruled against the setting up of National Patent Office. An appeal has been filed against this judgement in the Hon'ble High Court of Calcutta.

Assistance for private textile mills in Gujarat

1126. SHRI ANANTRAY DEVSHANKER DAVE: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether a proposal has been received from the Gujarat Government for assistance from National Renewal Fund in respect of statutory dues of workers of private textile mills under liquidation in that State;

(b) if so, the action taken thereon; and

(c) by when the funds would be released to the State Renewal fund?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN): (a) to (c) Yes Sir. Proposal from the Government of Gujarat has been received for assistance from the National Renewal Fund for payment of Statutory dues of workers of textile mills under liquidation. However, assistance from National Renewal Fund is available only for Voluntary Retirement Scheme in Central Public Sector Undertakings and for Counselling, retraining and redeployment of rationalised workers.